

## Historical Note on Raja Shahwali Khan of Mandla and his Willful Son

In the Kaigoharnama, towards the end of the published version, while describing the history and affairs of the Gakkhars of the erstwhile parganah of Akbarabad-Takhtpari, the author, most likely Raizada Ratanchand, made a passing remark about an incident that was a source of concern for the British who had recently taken over Punjab from the Sikhs [1, 2]. He referred to an individual named Nadir Khan and condemned his actions in very strong words. In addition to this, Raizada Ratanchand noted that despite Nadir Khan's actions, the British, after their initial response, treated his family members generously. No further details are provided, not even the date of the incident.

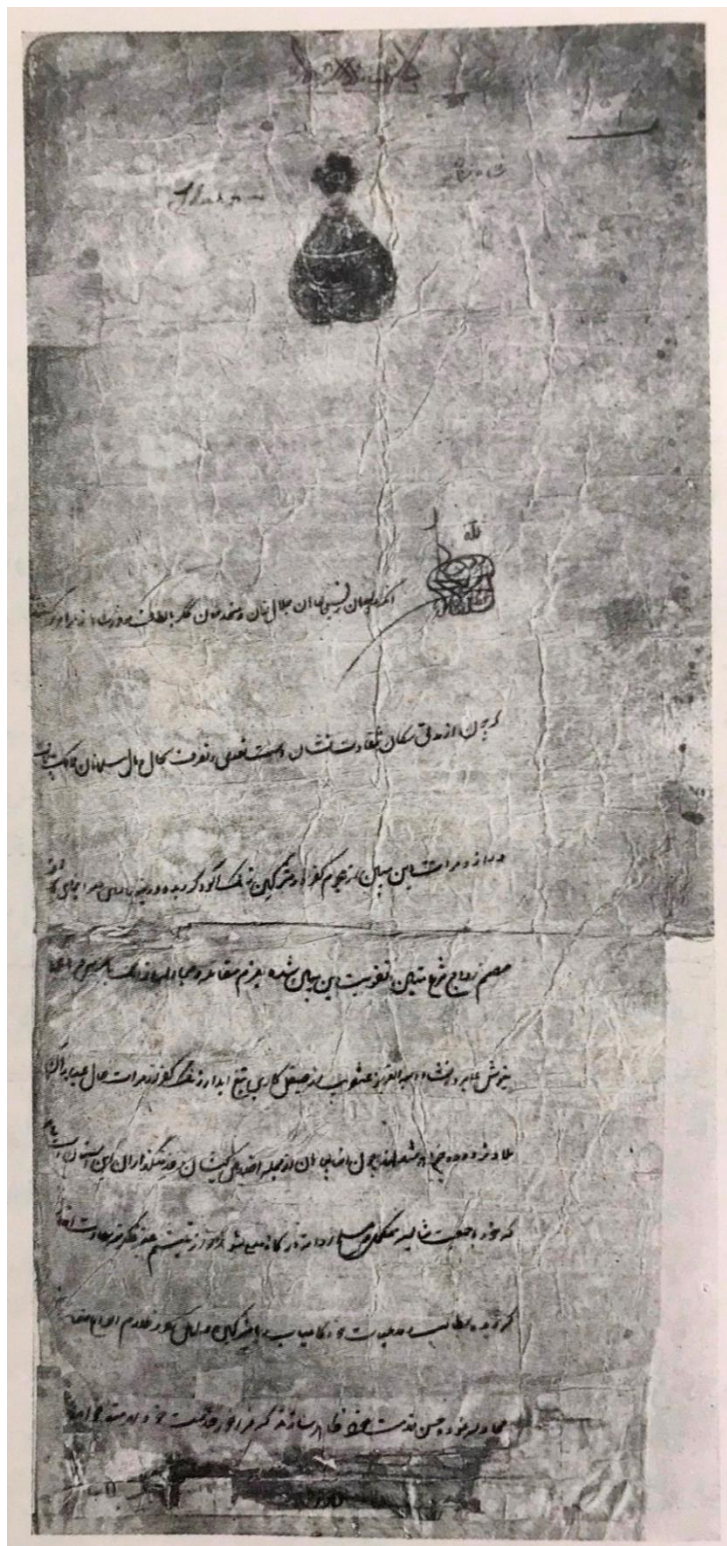
Page | 1

Raizada Ratanchand was a contemporary writer and chronicler and was present in Rawalpindi or its vicinity when the incident involving Nadir Khan took place. For more information about Raizada Ratanchand and his contribution in preserving and transmitting Gakkhar history, the reader is referred to 'Historical Note on Extant Manuscripts of Kaigoharnama', ver. 1.2, dated 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2024 and 'Historical Note on the Qanungo Family of Gulyana', ver. 1.1, dated 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2024. In order to understand the background and to work out the details of the incident that Raizada Ratanchand alludes to in the Kaigoharnama, we have to look at other contemporary or near contemporary sources of information.

The members of the ruling family of the parganah of Akbarabad-Takhtpari suffered from extreme disaccord after the demise of its last hereditary ruler Sultan Mubariz Khan in 1140 AH (1727-28 AD). The infighting ultimately led to a division of the territory of Akbarabad-Takhtpari among sons and grandsons of the late Sultan. The dispute continued for at least three generations after Sultan Mubariz Khan's death and caused bloodshed and became a source of lasting distrust among his descendants. The family was forced to disperse and their possessions and power considerably reduced over the years especially after the Rawalpindi region was overrun by the Sikhs during the early part of the 1770s [1-3].

Raja Jalal Khan, a great grandson of Sultan Mubariz Khan was granted the village Mandla (now located in the Islamabad capital territory) and perhaps some other adjoining areas as jagir by Sardar Milkha Singh, the Sikh military commander who had occupied Rawalpindi. The Afghan kings still considered Punjab as part of their territory and felt necessary to launch military expeditions to exert their control. During this period, the Gakkhar chiefs habitually aligned themselves with the Afghans as it enabled them to exercise a degree of autonomy that the Sikhs would never allow. Interestingly, Gakkhars even when their power was on a sharp decline were able to exercise considerable influence. This is evident by the instance when Raja Jalal

Khan and another great grandson of Sultan Mubariz Khan named Raja Munawar Khan participated in the first military expedition led by the Afghan king Zaman Shah Durrani (1767-1845) in 1796 and received a sanad (dated 1796-97) as a gesture of the king's pleasure [1].



Pothohar remained relatively tranquil during the early years of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839). During this period the Sikhs were fairly lenient in their treatment of the local population and the old social order by and large remained intact. With the consolidation of the Sikh power in the Punjab through gradual expulsion of Afghan influence and subjugation of any pockets of resistance, the attitude of the central authority in Lahore changed dramatically as it became more assertive and demanding. At some point of time during this period, Raja Jalal Khan was succeeded by his son Raja Shahwali Khan. Raja Shahwali Khan had a vigorous personality and a bad temper. This combination did not sit well with the Sikh authorities, and he was subdued and imprisoned by Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, the administrator of Hazara region, who deprived him of his inheritance and jagirs as well. To add insult to injury, when released, he was compelled to serve as a trooper in the cavalry unit of a Sikh chieftain [1, 2, 4].

When forced to the extreme by the exactions of the Sikh authorities, Raja Shahwali Khan would turn to lawlessness. The hilly country around him suited this kind of operation and he raided and pillaged at will [5]. He was actively assisted in these adventures by his eldest son, Nadir Khan. This is the same Nadir Khan who has been censured by Raizada Ratanchand in Kaigoharnama in no uncertain terms. Following the first Anglo-Sikh war, in 1847, when James Abbott arrived at Rawalpindi as boundary commissioner to draw-up a settlement of the land revenue for this part of the Punjab, he had a chance to meet and listen to what Raja Shahwali had to say [6, 7]. Raja Shahwali Khan presented his case in such a manner that James Abbott could not refute his claims. Despite the reluctance of the Sikh authorities, the Gakkhar chief was pardoned and a part of his old jagirs was restored to him. James Abbott was awestruck by the appearance and bearing of Raja Shahwali Khan and described him as one of the finest specimens of oriental gentry he ever came across.

While Raja Shahwali Khan could vacillate between being tempestuous and sagacious depending upon the need of the hour, his son Nadir Khan could not. At the outbreak of the second Anglo-Sikh war in 1848, Raja Shahwali Khan and his family sided with the British as did the majority of the Gakkhars of Rawalpindi and Hazara. When Punjab was annexed by the British in 1849, Raja Shahwali received an additional grant of jagir valued at Rs. 1,200 per annum as head of the Gakkhars of Mandla [8]. Nadir Khan demanded his share of the estate, which was somehow allowed. In effect, he had no right to receive this share as long as his father was alive. When the estate was divided, Nadir Khan was not satisfied with the value of his share and his situation was further complicated by a domestic quarrel that concerned Raja Shahwali Khan's second family. Resorting to desperate measures, in 1853, Nadir Khan got himself embroiled in a conspiracy that involved a mendicant posing as Kunwar Pashaura Singh, a son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who had been murdered at Attock fort in 1845 [9]. The intended objective of this conspiracy is not clear but the plan included a simultaneous attack on the Rawalpindi

cantonment and the Murree hill station. The conspiracy failed as the perpetrators were not discreet enough. The imposter ran away but was later apprehended, Jaffir Khan Golera, a well known landholder of the area and an active participant in the conspiracy surrendered, while Nadir Khan took to the hills. He was engaged in negotiations by local notables who induced him to surrender but he refused [10]. He was finally captured along with few of his followers through a police operation. All the conspirators were tried immediately. Nadir Khan and one of his followers were hanged while eight others received prison sentences of various durations [11]. An individual named Sultan Khan (d. 1889) belonging to the village Chanery (now located in the Murree district), who was a son of Raja Munawar Khan, the old comrade of Raja Shahwali Khan's father from the first expedition of Zaman Shah Durrani into Punjab was also found to be a sympathizer of Nadir Khan. He was not convicted but was expelled from his village and forced to live in Rawalpindi or south of the grand trunk road. He was not allowed to return to his village even as late as 1864 [3, 12]. Incidentally, while he was residing in Rawalpindi, Raizada Ratanchand had a chance to meet him (ca. 1859-60) and probably on his request, transcribed a copy of Kaigoharnama while staying at his house. This copy of Kaigoharnama has survived and adds veracity to the consequences of the failed conspiracy [13].

No measures of reprisal were carried out against other family members of Raja Shahwali Khan but the jagir he received from the British was confiscated [3]. Raja Shahwali Khan passed away in 1883 perhaps in desperate circumstances [8]. He managed to save his family from the yoke of Sikh rule and won friends among the new rulers but his willful son ruined all of his efforts.

The conspiracy that Nadir Khan became a part of was based on personal interests and prejudices and evidently he was not motivated by any feelings of nationalism or service to his countrymen. On the contrary, his actions had no popular support. For the general population of Pothohar, the downfall of Sikh empire was a sigh of relief as it brought to end decades of oppression and mismanagement. It is unlikely that the people would have participated in an endeavor to restore an unpopular and increasingly tyrannical regime that demanded submission by force of arms. The recent attempts of rewriting history by portraying Nadir Khan as a freedom fighter lack credibility and are a gross injustice to genuine scholarship that deals with historiography of Pothohar in general and Gakkhars in particular [14].

## References

1. Raezadeh Diwan Dunichand (M. Baqir, Ed.), *Kaigoharnameh*, The Panjabi Adabi Academy, Lahore, 1965.
2. Raja M. Yaqub Tariq, *Tarikh-e-Gakkharan*, Mirpur, 1956.
3. J. E. Cracroft, *Report on the Settlement of the Rawulpindee District*, Punjabee Press, Lahore, 1864.
4. Unknown, *Gazetteer of the Hazara District, 1883-4*, Civil and Military Gazette Press, Lahore, 1884.
5. Raja Kifayat Ali Khan, *Naqool-e-Parwanajat-e-Daftar Chaudhrian-e-Jandot Muta'alliq ba Qaum Gakkhar Zilla Jhelum-o-Rawalpindi-o-Mirpur*, Raja M. Aslam Khan Collection (Village Bakrala, Sohawa), Transcribed: 1935.

6. Unknown, Journals and Diaries of the Assistants to the Agent, Governor-General North-West Frontier and Resident at Lahore, 1846-1849, The Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1911.
7. Charles Allen, Soldier Sahibs, Abacus, London, 2001.
8. Unknown, Gazetteer of the Rawalpindi District, 1883-4, Civil and Military Gazette Press, Lahore, 1884.
9. Syad Muhammad Latif, History of the Panjab, Calcutta Central Press Company, Ltd., Calcutta, 1891.
10. W. L. Conran, H. D. Craik, Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab, Vol. 2, Civil and Military Gazette Press, Lahore, 1910. Page | 5
11. Unknown, Selections from the Records of the Government of India, No. 6, General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, 1851-52 and 1852-53, Calcutta Gazette Office, Calcutta, 1854.
12. Unknown, Gazetteer of the Rawalpindi District, 1893-94, Civil and Military Gazette Press, Lahore, 1895.
13. Raizada Diwan Dunichand, Kaigoharnama, Manuscript No. H52-7797, The Azir Collection, Punjab University Library, Lahore, 1724-25 (Transcribed: ca. 1859-60).
14. <https://www.independenturdu.com/node/166131> (Retrieved on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2024.)

### **Disclaimer**

The copyright of the photograph of the sanad granted by the Afghan king to Gakkhar chiefs belongs to its respective owner.